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ABSTRACT

Although research suggests that marital communication is causally related to marital satisfaction, the processes by which marital communication style affects marital relationships have not been identified. These communication styles (conventional, speculative, controlling, contactful) are based on the degrees of self-disclosure and openness to the other person. A secondary analysis of data gathered from structured interviews and audiotaped discussions between 171 couples was conducted to investigate the influence of communication on marital problems. Consistent relationships appeared between marital communication and marital problems; various types of verbal communication were related to the number and severity of marital problems and the likelihood that spouses would identify the same problems in their marriage. Controlling speech tended to dominate by increasing the number, severity, and ratio of jointly identified problems. Speculative speech was the second most influential style, acting to reduce the number and severity of marital problems and increase the proportion of jointly identified problems. The conventional style was not related to conventional characteristic problems, but a high level of controlling style was more associated with higher marital problems than any other communication style. Little support was found for marital communication style characteristics causing marital problems with similar characteristics. (Author/NRB)

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# Effects of Marital Communication Upon Marital Problems*

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## Effects of Marital Communication Upon Marital Problems

A relationship between marital communication and marital functioning is commonly recognized by theorists (Komarovsky, 1964; Bernstein, 1971; Rausch, et al., 1975; Mace and Mace, 1976; Sprenkle, 1980). There is increasing empirical evidence that marital communication is causally related to general measures of marital satisfaction (Ort, 1950; Karlsson, 1963; Navron, 1967; Murphy and Mendelson, 1973; Gottman, et al., 1977) but few attempts have been made to identify the processes by which marital communication affects marital relationships.

Our focus upon marital problems rather than marital satisfaction should not be taken as a negative measure of marital satisfaction. While marital problems are related to marital satisfaction/happiness, a number of researches have indicated marital satisfaction to be a balance of both positive and negative aspects of the relationship (Orden and Bradburn, 1968; Hawkins, 1968; Wills, et al., 1974; Bierchler, et al., 1975).

Spiegel (1968) argues that family communication processes influence (1) the creation of conflict; (2) the likelihood of mutual identification of conflict; and (3) the outcomes of conflicts. Problem creation is thought to be influenced by the spouses' abilities to disclose and receive role expectations prior to, and during, marriage. Once problems occur, their resolution usually depends upon an initial step of problem perception (Kieren and Tallman, 1972).

The outcome of conflicts, in Spiegel's view, is based upon the ability of the communication process to aid in the development of a new equilibrium. Factors influencing the development of an acceptable exchange include the willingness of each spouse (1) to express their needs and resources; (2) hear what their spouse is saying; and (3) alter their roles.

Spiegel's first two factors for developing a new exchange relationship, expression of one's needs and resources and willingness to listen to the other; corresponds to two major dimensions used by Hill (1965) in defining styles of communication. Our operationalization of communication styles is based upon Hill's interaction matrix, but as modified by Miller, et al. (1975) and Hawkins, et al. (1977, 1980).

### Communication Styles

Communication style is a summary description of how information is passed between two or more persons, rather than the content of the message. Four basic communication styles are created according to the extent a speech is (1) high or low in self-disclosure and (2) open or closed to hearing the other person and reconsidering one's own views in light of the other person.

Exhibit 1: Types of Communication Styles

| | Closed | Open |
|---|---|---|
| Low Disclosure | Conventional | Speculative |
| High Disclosure | Controlling | Contactful |

Conventional style avoids or glosses over feelings, motives or values of oneself and others. Light or casual conversation typifies the style.

Controlling style, like conventional style, is closed to the ideas or feelings of the other, but unlike the conventional style, the speaker's feelings are revealed, often in an attempt to impose the speaker's views.

Speculative style is the opposite of controlling in that the speaker indicates an openness to the ideas and feelings of others, but is guarded in self-disclosure, especially of feelings.

Contactful style combines openness to the other with high self-disclosure. For example, a husband may indicate to his wife that he is worried and elaborates on what is troubling him, providing an opportunity for her to respond to his self-revelation.

Besides the four separate styles, the styles can be dichotomized according to how open the person is to gathering new information about the other or listening to self-disclosure by the other. The two styles which are more open to the other's statements are the contactful and speculative styles, which Hill refers to as 'work' (Hawkins, et al., 1977, call it "open"). We shall use work level communication to indicate communication which is composed of the speculative and contactful styles.

Besides the summed proportions of the speech styles, sequences of spousal exchanges are examined. Doublets of work level communication involve one spouse using a work level communication and the spouse using a work level response. Triplets of work involve the work level initial statement, a work level reply, with the initial speaker remaining in the work mode for the reply to the reply.

## Marital Problems

Marital problems indicate role enactments are not meeting role expectations, i.e., there is role strain for the individual. Since expectation levels can vary among individuals, we are not concerned with an absolute level of enactment and expectation but rather are interested in relative differences between expectations and enactment of roles for the spouse.

Marital problems, as defined here, are identified by individuals, but the problem areas are relational issues--i.e., focusing upon couple issues. If an influence is detrimental to the system but is not perceived and reported by the spouses, it is not defined as a problem. Current marital problems were measured in several ways.

### The Number of Marital Problems

The number of current marital problems is based upon a checklist of 23 possible areas of disagreement (Appendix A). The number of problems is the number of problems identified by the husband plus the number identified by the wife--regardless of overlap. This method is used since the perception of a problem is separate for each partner and the extent of agreement on problem areas is considered in another variable.

## Severity of Marital Problems

The severity of the problem is based upon the respondent's assessment of the problem. As indicated in Appendix A, respondents were asked to indicate if the potential problem area was a big, medium, little, or no problem in their marriage. The problem severity score is the mean size of the problem. Big problems were given a value of three, medium problems a value of two, and little problems a value of one.

## Joint Marital Problems

During the interview portion of the study, the spouses independently checked which potential problem areas were problems within their marriage. When both spouses identified the same problem in their marriage (even if they attributed different degrees of severity) it is considered a joint problem. Couples differ in the number of problems identified so the joint problems are standardized as a proportion of the total number of marital problems identified in their marriage. Since a jointly identified problem represents two problems in the count for total problems, the computational formula for the proportion of jointly held problems is twice the number of joint problems, divided by the total number of problems.

## Styles of Marital Problems

Marital problems were selected, from the list of 23, which were thought to involve the characteristics of the degree of openness to self and extent of openness to the spouse--characteristics paralleling the dimensions in communication styles. Cluster analysis (BMDP1M) (Dixon, 1975) and factor analysis (PA2, varimax and oblique, with pairwise deletion) (Nie, et al., 1975) were performed to check empirical support for marital communication styles.

The list of marital problem areas was not designed to reflect communication style characteristics so not all marital problems pertain to any one style or even to the work/prework dichotomy. Face validity suggests problems which involve dimensions paralleling those of only two combinations of characteristics, conventional (problems 1, 4, 5, 11) and controlling (problems 3, 6, 8, and possibly 17) styles of communication. Several interpretations of a problem item by the respondents may have occurred, which would tend to mask relationships.

All 23 marital problems were included in the factor (Table 1) and cluster (Table 2) analyses in order to provide a more rigorous test of their validity. Four groupings were identified for wives' problems, since each item tended to load on just one factor (eigenvalues were above 1.00 for all but the fourth factor, which was 0.6055), and cluster analysis identified four similar primary clusters.

Table 1: Factor Analyses* of Marital Problems, for Wives (W) and Husbands (H)**

| Marital Problems | Factor 1 | | Factor 2 | | Factor 3 | | Factor 4 | | Factor 5 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | W | H | W | H | W | H | W | H | W | H |
| 01 Get things done | .110 | -.069 | .122 | .071 | .509 | .432 | .021 | .128 | --- | -.151 |
| 02 Bedtime | .335 | .380 | .094 | -.067 | .130 | .108 | .189 | .398 | --- | .046 |
| 03 Invite w/o check | .529 | .417 | .039 | .058 | .175 | .073 | .046 | .035 | --- | .001 |
| 04 Not listen | .190 | .259 | .242 | .013 | .386 | .373 | .030 | .034 | --- | .141 |
| 05 Talk re problems | .179 | .147 | .621 | .507 | .075 | .149 | .231 | .096 | --- | .024 |
| 06 Criticizing | .505 | -.158 | .401 | .444 | .118 | .377 | .149 | -.050 | --- | .074 |
| 07 Wife's cooking | .280 | .052 | .054 | .146 | .332 | -.117 | .246 | .418 | --- | -.033 |
| 08 Being bossy | .506 | .241 | .024 | .236 | .160 | -.210 | .158 | .042 | --- | -.037 |
| 09 Getting angry | .470 | .432 | .248 | .237 | .312 | -.048 | .086 | .100 | --- | -.080 |
| 10 Spending money | .468 | .378 | .017 | .132 | .272 | .254 | .074 | .248 | --- | -.013 |
| 11 Put things off | .158 | .067 | .050 | .079 | .596 | .422 | .191 | .026 | --- | .030 |
| 12 Church | .086 | .107 | .012 | -.015 | .126 | .131 | .371 | .385 | --- | .044 |
| 13 Doing together | .348 | .025 | .347 | .387 | .149 | .112 | .276 | .261 | --- | .033 |
| 14 Sex relations | .183 | .069 | .604 | .119 | .161 | .056 | .025 | .520 | --- | .142 |
| 15 Wife's habits | .266 | .099 | .138 | .400 | .502 | -.111 | .026 | .211 | --- | .001 |
| 16 Watching TV | .027 | .077 | .159 | .298 | .073 | .256 | .869 | .198 | --- | .029 |
| 17 Making decisions | .562 | .613 | .272 | .232 | .128 | .069 | .139 | .154 | --- | .200 |
| 18 Disciplining child | .344 | .033 | .089 | .131 | .221 | .029 | .129 | .315 | --- | .086 |
| 19 Showing affection | -.048 | .045 | .546 | .413 | .089 | .016 | .038 | .454 | --- | .033 |
| 20 Husband's habits | .430 | .188 | .226 | .392 | .377 | .162 | .016 | -.071 | --- | .059 |
| 21 Husband's driving | .210 | .164 | .094 | -.024 | .276 | .007 | .101 | .165 | --- | .603 |
| 22 Social behavior | .268 | -.105 | .141 | .183 | -.008 | .002 | .347 | .078 | --- | .510 |
| 23 Willing to talk | .177 | .061 | .646 | .576 | .174 | .013 | .108 | .162 | --- | .112 |

* Rotated factor loadings for principle factoring with iteration, Quartimax rotation, pair-wise deletion.

** Husbands' factors were renumbered while placing sexes' similar factors together, Husbands' original ordering is: 4, 1, 2, 3, 5.

Table 2 : Cluster Analysis* of Marital Problems, by Wives (W) and Husbands (H)

| WIVES | HUSBANDS |
|---|---|
| 01 Get things done | 01 Get things done |
| 11 Put things off | 04 Not listen |
| 07 Wife's cooking | 11 Put things off |
| 18 Disciplining children | 02 Bedtime |
| 04 Not listen | 03 Invite without checking |
| 15 Wife's habits | 10 Spending money |
| 20 Husband's habits | 17 Making decisions |
| 21 Husband's driving | 09 Getting angry |
| 03 Invite without checking | 08 Being bossy |
| 08 Being bossy | 20 Husband's habit |
| 09 Getting angry | 05 Talk re problems |
| 10 Spending money | 23 Willing to talk |
| 06 Criticizing | 06 Criticizing |
| 17 Making decisions | 16 Watching TV |
| 05 Talk re problems | 13 Doing together |
| 23 Willing to talk | 14 Sex relations |
| 13 Doing together | 19 Showing affection |
| 14 Sex relations | 15 Wife's habits |
| 19 Showing affection | 18 Disciplining children |
| 16 Watching TV | 07 Wife's cooking |
| 22 Social behavior | 12 Church |
| 02 Bedtime | 21 Husband's driving |
| 12 Church | 22 Social behavior |

*Average distance method
Solid line (____): Major division between clusters.
Dashed line (_ _ _): Separate clusters, but closely related with the cluster on the other side of the line.

The husbands' factor and cluster analyses are best represented with five groupings.

The main factor loadings and cluster location of the items were not only in high agreement with each other but the predicted groupings were highly supported. Table 3 indicates, for the preselected variables and other empirically related problems, if their strongest location was with conventional-characteristic or controlling-characteristic groupings. Since we are only concerned with the two groups, other groupings were omitted from the table.

Table 3: Marital Problems by Factor Analyses (FA) and Cluster Analyses (CA) Groupings, by Sex (X: In cluster or largest factor loading)

| | WIVES | | HUSBANDS | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Conventional Characteristics | FA | CA | FA | CA |
| 01 Get things done around the house* | X | X | X | X |
| 04 Not listening carefully* | X | X | X | X |
| 05 Willingness to talk re problems* | - | - | - | - |
| 07 Wife's cooking | X | X | - | - |
| 11 Putting things off* | X | X | X | X |
| 15 Wife's irritating personal habits | X | X | - | - |
| 18 Disciplining the children | - | X | - | - |
| 21 Husband's driving | X | X | - | - |
| Controlling Characteristics | | | | |
| 02 Bedtime hour | X | - | - | X |
| 03 Inviting friends w/o checking** | X | X | X | X |
| 06 Criticizing** | X | X | - | - |
| 08 Being bossy** | X | X | X | X |
| 09 Getting angry | X | X | X | X |
| 10 Spending money | X | X | X | X |
| 17 Making decisions** | X | X | X | X |
| 18 Disciplining the children | X | - | - | - |
| 20 Husband's irritating personal habits | X | - | - | X |

* Predicted, from face validity, as conventional

** Predicted, from face validity, as controlling

Items 1, 4, and 11 were predicted as indicators of the same construct and received further support with empirical grouping methods for husbands and wives, so we use these three problems as our indicators of conventional characteristic marital problems. The values of the items for each spouse are added to create a couple conventional problems scale, with possible (and actual) scores ranging from 0 - 18, reflecting the number and severity of the problems for both spouses.

There was also strong empirical support for selecting marital problems with controlling characteristics. Items 3, 8 and 17 were chosen on the basis of face validity and were also empirically grouped together for both husbands and wives. Item 6 started out with the husbands' controlling factor but as we forced fewer factors, the strongest loading (.444) was with a factor focusing upon verbal communication and controlling behavior, with a lesser loading (.377) on the predicted controlling factor. The two factors have a moderate correlation of 0.219. We retain problem 6 in the couple controlling problems scale due to its face validity, the strong support for wives and modest support for husbands. The couple controlling problems scale is composed of the above four items (3, 6, 8, and 17) plus items 9 and 10, due to the strong empirical evidence that they are measuring the same construct as the other items for both husbands and wives, plus the

face validity being reasonable. The couple controlling problems scale scores could vary from 0 - 36, with an actual distribution from 0 - 32.

Our concern is primarily with the groupings of conventional and controlling problems, but the degree of overall consistency between the two methods of empirically assigning the problems to groups reflects upon the confidence we can place in the use of the methods. For the husbands' five groupings, only three of the 23 problems were not assigned the same way by factor and cluster analyses. There were four nonmatches for the wives' four sets of problems. In almost every instance when the largest factor loading did not match the cluster assignment, the second highest factor loading did match the cluster and was almost as high as the primary loading. Because of the high agreement between the two very different methods, we gain confidence that the sets of marital problems are not simply artifacts of the identifying method but are rooted in real differences.

## Propositions

### Number of Marital Problems

If the spouses agree upon their system's basic goals, it is expected that work level information exchange will decrease the system's role strain through helping to resolve difference prior to their becoming marital problems and aiding resolution of problems which do occur.

Speculative style speech should aid in identifying strains and possible solutions through tentatively proposing ideas and through encouraging the spouses to reveal themselves. Contactful style speech should not only provide the opportunities of speculative speech, but also provide information about the speaker's ideas and feelings. We anticipate that a higher use of contactful marital communication will result in the fewest current marital problems with high use of speculative style marital communication being associated with the second fewest marital problems.

Both Bienvenu (1970) and Karlsson (1963) have indicated the necessity of following problem identification with other problem solving efforts. If identified problems are not resolved, the marital problems will probably be compounded. Controlling communication is predicted to result in the most marital problems since it blocks mutual solutions to the problems through a disregard of the other spouse's ideas and feelings, while encouraging the expression of problems to the spouse.

Conventional style communication on the part of both spouses would not be helpful in solving problems nor would it emphasize identification of existing problems, so it is seen as being next to controlling style in the number of marital problems.

The causal direction between communication and problems is posited to be that marital communication usage influences the marital problems. The opposite causal direction is also possible if the existence of marital problems results in changing the marital speech patterns. Any system is expected to have tensions and all of the couples in this study reported

marital problems. While the number of problems encountered may vary among couples, it is assumed that couples who have been married very long would have essentially the same communications usage is the existence of problems had a major affect upon communication style usage. In addition, the problem-causes-communication direction does not account for resolution of marital problems.

The first proposition to be tested becomes:

Work level marital communication will inversely influence the number of reported marital problems.

Proposition One is tested using the couples' ratios of doublets and triplets of work level communication, the proportion of contactful, speculative, and work style (contactful plus speculative) communication. Analyses are also conducted using the prework styles since the basis for predicting the rank orderings predicts the ordering of prework styles. If the rank orderings are consistent with the predictions, we gain confidence in the rationale.

## Problem Severity

The second proposition, concerned with problem severity, is based upon the same rationale as the first--the ability of work level communication to resolve strains prior to their becoming problems and aiding in the resolution of problems which do occur. The same rank ordering is expected as for the first proposition, with controlling style being associated with the most severe problems, conventional next, and couples higher in their usage of contactful style speech having the lowest problem severity. The second proposition can be stated as:

Work level marital communication will inversely influence the severity of reported marital problems.

## Jointly Cited Problems

We have noted that couples usually need to identify their problems prior to solving them. However, if problems are repeatedly identified but not resolved, there would be repeated opportunities for problem expression and therefore joint identification.

Conventional style marital communication is expected to cause the lowest proportion of jointly identified problems since neither spouse is open to expressing nor hearing feelings and opinions.

At the other extreme, both controlling and contactful styles of communication involve spouses expressing their feelings and opinions, which should encourage learning of the partners's perceived problems. If both spouses are high in their use of contactful speech they not only express themselves but also listen to their spouse, which is conducive to the spouses agreeing upon tension areas. However, contactful speech is expected to lead to

earlier problem resolution than is controlling style speech. Since we are measuring current problems, the continual expression of unsolved marital problems associated with controlling style speech is expected to be a greater influence than the openness-to-hearing of contactful speech. Therefore, the highest proportion of joint problems is expected to be associated with controlling speech, followed by contactful, then speculative, with conventional having the lowest proportion.

Since the two prework styles are anticipated to be at the extremes of the proportions of jointly identified problems, the work/prework distinction is not relevant for testing the proposition. The third proposition to be tested is:

> The expression of thoughts and feelings between spouses will influence in a positive direction the proportion of current marital problems which are jointly cited.

## Problem Styles

A principle underlying much of Deutsch's work concerning the effects of cooperation and competition upon group process is, in part, ". . . the characteristic processes and affects elicited by a given type of social relationship. . . tend also to elicit that type of social relationship" (Deutsch, 1973: 365).

Reciprocity in the use of speech styles (reciprocity between processes) is a recurring theme in communication research (Jourard and Richman, 1963; Kieslar, et al., 1967; Vandracek, 1969; Alexander, 1973; Wills, et al., 1974; Gilbert, 1976), but Deutsch points to a nonrecursive linkage between a process and a relationship. Applying Deutsch's principle to our problem, we expect the marital problems (effect of the social relationship) to be similar to the marital communication styles used most (processes of the social relationship). The similarity tested will be the pattern of openness of self and openness to the other. The last proposition is therefore stated as:

> The use of a marital communication style will cause marital problems with a similar pattern of openness of oneself and openness to the spouse.

# Methods

## Sample

This study is a secondary analysis of data collected by James Hawkins, principle investigator, during 1973 (see Hawkins, et al., 1977, or Banwart, 1979, for a more complete description of the sample and research methods). This sample is composed of 171 white couples married three or more years, with one or more children over the age of one year living at home, and the husband between 21 and 40 years of age. The sample was drawn through a two

stage sampling procedure to approximate a representative selection of the above described couples from Marion County, Indiana, which includes the city of Indianapolis. Because of these restrictions, the sample is not representative of all marriages but there is the advantage of a reduction of variance due to race, stage in the family life cycle, or unique features of early marriages.

## Interview

Structured interviews were held with the husband and wife simultaneously but separately by same-sex interviewers in the subjects' homes. During the interview, the subjects were read "a list of things that couples often have problems with" (Appendix A). The subjects were asked to indicate how much of a problem each of the 23 things were in their marriage. Four response categories were provided: a big problem, a medium problem, a little problem, or no problem.

## Method of Studying Couple Communication by Outside Observers

Following the individual interviews, the spouses were brought together to participate in four brief discussions, none of which lasted for more than five minutes. While informing the respondents that the discussions would be audio tape-recorded, the confidentiality of the recordings was stressed. The investigators left the subjects alone for the five minute periods, returning to stop the discussion and introduce the next topic. If the topic was completed before the time was up, the subjects were free to talk about anything they wished--allowing couples great freedom in how, and if, they dealt with the topics.

The analyses of this study are based upon the third discussion topic. The couples were asked to discuss one of their own marital problems, which the investigators had chosen from the problems check list. When possible, the problem was a "medium" problem which both spouses had independently indicated. Using Strodtbech's (1951) revealed difference technique, it was explained that both had indicated the matter was a problem and they would have five minutes to talk about it. Effective problem solving techniques were encouraged, although the couple was not asked to arrive at a solution but rather to try for understanding.

Coding of the exercise was done on a speech-by-speech basis, with a 77.7 percent agreement (see Hawkins, et al., or Banwart, 1979, for more detail).

To determine the couple's communication style combination each speech style was dichotomized approximately at the median, resulting in each person having a "higher" or "lower" value for each of the four speech styles. The style usage for a couple consists of combinations of the spouses' values on each style, e.g., couples in which both are higher on contactful versus couples in which both are lower in their use of contactful speech. Mixed couples (one spouse higher, the other lower) and combinations of more than one style are possible and were investigated.

## Results

### Communication and Number of Problems

The proportion of doublets and triplets of work level statements makes little difference in the number of marital problems reported (Table 4). Looking at the total usage of single speech styles, if members of couples are both higher in their usage of contactful speech there are fewer marital problems than when both spouses are lower in their usage of the style, but the difference (of just over two problems) is not statistically significant. Speculative style usage shows a slightly greater divergence, which is statistically significant, primarily due to the higher use of speculative style speech lowering the number of problems.

Table 4: Differences in the Number of Marital Problems by Marital Communication Styles

| Marital Communication Style | | (N) | Mean # of Probs | T-test 1-tail sig | r |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Doublets of Work | Both lo | 80 | 23.313 | .418 | -.0887 |
| | Both hi | 80 | 23.063 | | |
| Triplets of Work | Both lo | 81 | 23.728 | .184 | -.0919 |
| | Both hi | 79 | 22.633 | | |
| Contactful | Both lo | 51 | 23.510 | .118 | |
| | Both hi | 43 | 21.651 | | |
| Speculative | Both lo | 61 | 23.967 | .036 | |
| | Both hi | 60 | 21.483 | | |
| Contactful & Speculative | Both lo | 28 | 23.536 | .038 | |
| | Both hi | 26 | 20.154 | | |
| Controlling | Both lo | 55 | 20.782 | .002 | |
| | Both hi | 55 | 25.091 | | |
| Conventional | Both lo | 52 | 23.553 | .206 | |
| | Both hi | 53 | 22.321 | | |
| Controlling & Conventional | Both lo | 15 | 21.933 | .168 | |
| | Both hi | 16 | 24.938 | | |

Comparing couples who are both high with couples who are both low on both work level styles (speculative and contactful) reveals a greater difference in the number of problems than for either of the individual styles. Thus the sequencing of work level speeches is not as closely related to the number of problems as is the proportion of work level speeches.

The predicted ordering of the number of marital problems according to speech style was (from most to least): Controlling, conventional, speculative, and contactful. This ranking was supported except with higher speculative style speech couples having a slightly lower mean number of problems than do couples who use higher levels of contactful style communication. Consistent with the prediction, higher use of controlling style speech is clearly associated with more marital problems, and the work/prework distinction exists.

Table 5 involves considering two styles of communication simultaneously with both spouses having the same pattern for the two styles (although they may differ on a third). Two tendencies are apparent: (1) the number of couples high on both a work and a prework style is small. For example, there are only six couples in which both spouses are high on both controlling and speculative styles of speech. It appears that the work/prework distinction is a reality for the couples in practice (this pattern was further varified through cluster analysis see Banwart, 1979; 93ff). (2) The patterns observed in Table 4 are essentially repeated, with work level styles having fewer problems associated with them than do prework styles. Speculative style speech appears to do the most to reduce the number of problems, while controlling style speech has a marked tendency to increase the number of problems, except for the few instances when the couple is also high in speculative speech.

Table 5: Differences in the Number of Marital Problems for Combinations of Marital Communication Styles -- Spouses Having the Same Combination of Styles

| Marital Communication Styles | (N) | Mean # Probs. | T-test 1-tail sig |
|---|---|---|---|
| Conventional/Controlling | | | |
| Conventional only hi | 37 | 21.189 | .012 |
| Controlling only hi | 39 | 25.154 | |
| Conventional & Controlling hi | 16 | 24.938 | |
| None of the prior | 79 | 23.038 | |
| Conventional/Speculative | | | |
| Conventional only hi | 45 | 22.689 | |
| Speculative only hi | 52 | 21.673 | .258 |
| Conventional & Speculative hi | 8 | 20.250 | |
| None of the prior | 66 | 25.364 | |
| Conventional/Contactful | | | |
| Conventional only hi | 46 | 23.152 | .368 |
| Contactful only hi | 36 | 22.583 | |
| Conventional & Contactful hi | 7 | 16.857 | |
| None of the prior | 82 | 24.244 | |
| Controlling/Speculative | | | |
| Controlling only hi | 49 | 25.571 | .003 |
| Speculative only hi | 54 | 21.519 | |
| Controlling & Speculative hi | 6 | 21.167 | |
| None of the prior | 62 | 23.258 | |
| Controlling/Contactful | | | |
| Controlling only hi | 47 | 25.213 | .007 |
| Contactful only hi | 35 | 21.029 | |
| Controlling & Contactful hi | 8 | 24.375 | |
| None of the prior | 81 | 23.062 | |
| Speculative/Contactful | | | |
| Speculative only hi | 34 | 22.500 | .264 |
| Contactful only hi | 17 | 23.941 | |
| Speculative & Contactful hi | 26 | 20.154 | |
| None of the prior | 94 | 24.340 | |

Communication and Problem Severity

Nearly unanimous support is found for the proposition that work level communication will inversely influence the severity of reported marital problems (Tables 6 and 7). The main patterns found with the number of problems also hold for problem severity--controlling style has the greatest influence (except when combined with high usage of speculative style) and the rank orderings of the styles has the least severity associated with speculative, followed by contactful and ending with controlling style speech. Doublets and triplets of work style communication are significantly correlated with problem severity, which is consistent with the proposition but the comparable correlations for number of problems were not significant. (Tables 6 and 7 follow on the next two pages.)

Communication and Joint Citation of Problems

The third proposition receives mixed support, as shown in Table 8. Contrary to the prediction, speculative speech is more closely associated with joint problems than is contactful speech. This switching of the order of the two work styles is, of course, consistent with the data for the prior two propositions. The only statistically significant differences between styles is between controlling style and styles which are not ranked adjacent to the controlling style. (Table 8 follows.)

Communication and Marital Problem Characteristics

It was heartening to be able to empirically identify groupings of conventional and controlling marital problems using the same dimensions as for marital communication styles. However, we find almost no support for the hypothesized relationships between the use of conventional marital communication and conventional-characteristic marital problems (Table 9). The absence of relationships between conventional style speech and conventional characteristic problems may be due to one or more of the following reasons: (1) the speech style does not influence problem characteristics; (2) an absence of openness can occur through not talking or listening (which was not measured) as well as in speech which involves not being open (conventional style); and (3) two of the three conventional problems do not necessarily involve use of speech (putting things off; not getting things done around the house). Separate analysis of the three convention scale items indicate that none of the three problems are significantly correlated with the ratio of conventional speech used by the spouses, so the third reason is not likely. (Table 9 follows.)

Turning to controlling characteristic marital problems' relationships with maritalcommunication styles, we find consistent support for the fourth proposition (Table 10). Controlling speech comparisons provide at least directional support, and the differences are frequently statistically significant. Speculative style communication is expected to be lower on the problem scale and its components due to its having opposite

Table 6: Differences in the Severity of Marital Problems by Marital Communication Style

| | | Joint | | | | Nonjoint | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Marital Communication Style | | (N) | Mean Severity of Probe | Sig T-test (1-tail) | r | (N) | Mean Severity of Probe | Sig T-test (1-tail) | r |
| Doublets of Work | Both lo | 77 | 1.6476 | .003 | -.2980*** | 80 | 1.2685 | .032 | -.1904** |
| | Both hi | 79 | 1.4743 | | | 79 | 1.1820 | | |
| Triplets of Work | Both lo | 77 | 1.6193 | .028 | -.2499*** | 80 | 1.2552 | .102 | -.1391* |
| | Both hi | 79 | 1.4989 | | | 79 | 1.1955 | | |
| Contactful | Both lo | 51 | 1.5696 | .052 | | 51 | 1.2083 | .408 | |
| | Both hi | 41 | 1.4422 | | | 43 | 1.1945 | | |
| Speculative | Both lo | 58 | 1.6756 | .000 | | 61 | 1.3037 | .002 | |
| | Both hi | 59 | 1.4209 | | | 59 | 1.1471 | | |
| Contactful & Speculative | Both lo | 28 | 1.6400 | .002 | | 28 | 1.3013 | .108 | |
| | Both hi | 25 | 1.3263 | | | 26 | 1.1925 | | |
| Controlling | Both lo | 53 | 1.3548 | .000 | | 54 | 1.1404 | .001 | |
| | Both hi | 54 | 1.7144 | | | 55 | 1.3148 | | |
| Conventional | Both lo | 51 | 1.5776 | .445 | | 51 | 1.2091 | .469 | |
| | Both hi | 51 | 1.5662 | | | 53 | 1.2047 | | |
| Controlling & Conventional | Both lo | 14 | 1.2791 | .002 | | 14 | 1.1931 | .225 | |
| | Both hi | 16 | 1.7162 | | | 16 | 1.2826 | | |

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

Table 7: Differences in the Severity of Marital Problems for Combinations of Marital Communication Styles -- Spouses Having the Same Combination

| Marital Communication Styles | Joint Problems (N) | Joint Problems Mean Severity of Probs | Joint Problems Sig T-test (1-tail) | Nonjoint Problems (N) | Nonjoint Problems Mean Severity of Probs | Nonjoint Problems Sig T-test (1-tail) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Conventional/Controlling** | | | | | | |
| Conventional only hi | 35 | 1.4977 | .014 | 37 | 1.1710 | .010 |
| Controlling only hi | 38 | 1.7137 | | 39 | 1.3280 | |
| Conventional & Controlling hi | 16 | 1.7162 | | 16 | 1.2826 | |
| None of the Prior | 78 | 1.4873 | | 78 | 1.1937 | |
| **Conventional/Speculative** | | | | | | |
| Conventional only hi | 43 | 1.5667 | .018 | 45 | 1.2020 | .106 |
| Speculative only hi | 51 | 1.3985 | | 51 | 1.1357 | |
| Conventional & Speculative hi | 8 | 1.5839 | | 8 | 1.2196 | |
| None of the Prior | 65 | 1.6893 | | 66 | 1.3179 | |
| **Conventional/Contactful** | | | | | | |
| Conventional only hi | 45 | 1.6039 | .076 | 46 | 1.2250 | .460 |
| Contactful only hi | 35 | 1.4694 | | 36 | 1.2184 | |
| Conventional & Contactrul hi | 6 | 1.1284 | | 7 | 1.0714 | |
| None of the Prior | 81 | 1.6012 | | 81 | 1.2474 | |
| **Controlling/Speculative** | | | | | | |
| Controlling only hi | 48 | 1.7545 | .000 | 49 | 1.3380 | .001 |
| Speculative only hi | 53 | 1.4240 | | 53 | 1.1495 | |
| Controlling & Speculative hi | 6 | 1.3940 | | 6 | 1.1259 | |
| None of the Prior | 60 | 1.5493 | | 62 | 1.2179 | |
| **Controlling/Contactful** | | | | | | |
| Controlling only hi | 46 | 1.7200 | .000 | 47 | 1.3188 | .018 |
| Contactful only hi | 33 | 1.3841 | | 35 | 1.1722 | |
| Controlling & Contactful hi | 8 | 1.6822 | | 8 | 1.2919 | |
| None of the Prior | 80 | 1.5344 | | 80 | 1.1926 | |
| **Speculative/Contactful** | | | | | | |
| Speculative only hi | 34 | 1.4905 | .106 | 33 | 1.1113 | .114 |
| Contactful only hi | 16 | 1.6233 | | 17 | 1.1975 | |
| Speculative & Contactful hi | 25 | 1.3263 | | 26 | 1.1925 | |
| None of the Prior | 92 | 1.6435 | | 94 | 1.2842 | |

Table 8: Differences in the Proportion of Marital Problems Jointly Identified for Combinations of Marital Communication Styles -- Spouses Having the Same Combination of Styles

| Marital Communication Styles | (N) | Mean ratio joint probs | T-test 1-tail sig |
|---|---|---|---|
| Conventional/Controlling | | | |
| Conventional only hi | 37 | .54652 | .010 |
| Controlling only hi | 39 | .64783 | |
| Conventional & Controlling hi | 16 | .64228 | |
| None of the prior | 79 | .61437 | |
| Conventional/Speculative | | | |
| Conventional only hi | 45 | .57183 | .142 |
| Speculative only hi | 52 | .61249 | |
| Conventional & Speculative hi | 8 | .59566 | |
| None of the prior | 66 | .63562 | |
| Conventional/Contactful | | | |
| Conventional only hi | 46 | .58677 | .421 |
| Contactful only hi | 36 | .59479 | |
| Conventional & Contactful hi | 7 | .50089 | |
| None of the prior | 82 | .63888 | |
| Controlling/Speculative | | | |
| Controlling only hi | 49 | .64823 | .128 |
| Speculative only hi | 54 | .60808 | |
| Controlling & Speculative hi | 6 | .62976 | |
| None of the prior | 62 | .57936 | |
| Controlling/Contactful | | | |
| Controlling only hi | 47 | .64820 | .023 |
| Contactful only hi | 35 | .56693 | |
| Controlling & Contactful hi | 8 | .63452 | |
| None of the prior | 81 | .60388 | |
| Speculative/Contactful | | | |
| Speculative only hi | 34 | .63363 | .157 |
| Contactful only hi | 17 | .57925 | |
| Speculative & Contactful hi | 26 | .57967 | |
| None of the prior | 94 | .61528 | |

Table 9: Conventional Characteristic Problems by Combinations of Couple Marital Communication Styles (Means and t-test Significance)

| Marital Communication Styles | (N) | Scale $\bar{X}$ | 1-tail sig. | $\bar{X}$ # probs | 1-tail sig. | $\bar{X}$ severity | 1-tail sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Conventional | 37 | 7.6757 | .134 | 4.7568 | .278 | 1.5293 | .083 |
| Controlling | 39 | 8.6154 | | 4.9231 | | 1.7051 | |
| Conventional | 45 | 8.0889 | .200 | 4.8222 | .356 | 1.5970 | .103 |
| Speculative | 52 | 7.4808 | | 4.9231 | | 1.4580 | |
| Conventional | 46 | 8.5435 | .221 | 5.0000 | .500 | 1.6706 | .102 |
| Contactful | 36 | 7.9167 | | 5.0000 | | 1.5102 | |
| Controlling | 49 | 8.9796 | .032 | 4.9388 | .449 | 1.7687 | .005 |
| Speculative | 54 | 7.6481 | | 4.9074 | | 1.4944 | |
| Controlling | 47 | 8.7447 | .030 | 4.8936 | .253 | 1.7358 | .004 |
| Contactful | 35 | 7.1714 | | 4.6857 | | 1.4052 | |
| Contactful | 17 | 8.1765 | .437 | 4.7647 | .275 | 1.5637 | .489 |
| Speculative | 34 | 8.0000 | | 5.0000 | | 1.5593 | |
| Conventional | | | | | | | |
| Both hi | 53 | 8.1132 | .489 | 4.8302 | .445 | 1.6038 | .476 |
| Both lo | 52 | 8.1346 | | 4.8654 | | 1.5971 | |
| Controlling | | | | | | | |
| Both hi | 55 | 8.7636 | .004 | 4.9455 | .183 | 1.7258 | .000 |
| Both lo | 55 | 6.9455 | | 4.7273 | | 1.4009 | |
| Speculative | | | | | | | |
| Both hi | 60 | 7.5833 | .053 | 4.9167 | .342 | 1.4825 | .008 |
| Both lo | 61 | 8.6557 | | 4.8197 | | 1.7194 | |
| Contactful | | | | | | | |
| Both hi | 43 | 7.4884 | .184 | 4.7907 | .396 | 1.4539 | .050 |
| Both lo | 51 | 8.1569 | | 4.8627 | | 1.6356 | |

combinations for self/other openness of controlling speech. The directional differences are as predicted but the differences are not statistically significant for between-style comparisons except when it involves controlling speech. However, the relationships do appear when comparing higher and lower usage of speculative style speech.

Table 10: Controlling Characteristic Problems by Combinations of Couple Marital Communication Styles (Means and t-test Significance)

| Marital Communication Styles | (N) | Scale $\bar{X}$ | 1-tail sig. | $\bar{X}$ # probs. | 1-tail sig. | $\bar{X}$ severity | 1-tail sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Conventional | 36 | 8.4167 | .005 | 5.9722 | | 1.7676 | |
| Controlling | 38 | 11.8160 | | 7.3421 | .018 | 2.4368 | .008 |
| Conventional | 44 | 9.2045 | .324 | 6.5000 | .354 | 2.1651 | .180 |
| Speculative | 52 | 8.7115 | | 6.2885 | | 1.8016 | |
| Conventional | 45 | 9.8444 | .479 | 6.7111 | .456 | 2.2637 | .197 |
| Contactful | 36 | 9.7778 | | 6.6389 | | 1.9162 | |
| Controlling | 48 | 12.1460 | .002 | 7.5208 | .010 | 2.7139 | .010 |
| Speculative | 54 | 8.9815 | | 6.2593 | | 1.8466 | |
| Controlling | 46 | 11.8480 | .010 | 7.3696 | .016 | 2.6982 | .011 |
| Contactful | 35 | 8.8000 | | 6.0571 | | 1.7790 | |
| Contactful | 17 | 10.4120 | .242 | 6.8824 | .322 | 2.1010 | .359 |
| Speculative | 34 | 9.2941 | | 6.5000 | | 1.9711 | |
| Conventional | | | | | | | |
| Both hi | 52 | 9.2692 | .160 | 6.4231 | .198 | 2.1311 | .490 |
| Both lo | 51 | 10.4310 | | 6.9020 | | 2.1219 | |
| Controlling | | | | | | | |
| Both hi | 54 | 11.6300 | .001 | 7.3704 | .004 | 2.5886 | .010 |
| Both lo | 55 | 8.2909 | | 5.9818 | | 1.7915 | |
| Speculative | | | | | | | |
| Both hi | 60 | 8.8333 | .040 | 6.2500 | .114 | 1.8206 | .031 |
| Both lo | 59 | 10.6610 | | 6.8644 | | 2.4251 | |
| Contactful | | | | | | | |
| Both hi | 43 | 9.0930 | .170 | 6.3023 | .120 | 1.8124 | .058 |
| Both lo | 50 | 10.1200 | | 6.9400 | | 2.3763 | |

Reviewing the findings for both sets of marital problems, we find that conventional style speech is not related to conventional characteristic problems, but a high level of controlling style marital communication is always associated with highermarital problems than is any other marital communication group. Consequently, we find no support for communication characteristics being associated with similar problem characteristics.

## Summary and Conclusions

Consistent relationships appear between marital communication and marital problems. The proportion of work level speeches were found to

be more important than if the partners engaged in sequences of doublets and triplets of work level communication.

The first three propositions stand independently, but they can be viewed together to describe distinct sets of problem characteristics which go beyond each problem trait. Exhibit 2 summarizes the ranking of the four communication styles in relationship to the number, severity, and extent of joint marital problems. The differences between the problem characteristics for adjacent communication styles are not always statistically significant but the consistencies in the patterns provide more assurance in the rankings than if the rank orderings had not been reported.

Exhibit 2: Observed Rank Orderings of Marital Problem Means by Marital Communication Style

| Marital Communication Style | Mean Number Problems | Mean Severity | Ratio Joint |
|---|---|---|---|
| Controlling | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Conventional | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| Contactful | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Speculative | 4 | 4 | 2 |

The work/prework distinction is reflected in the number and severity of marital problems, with controlling and speculative styles at the extremes. We repeatedly observed that controlling speech tended to dominate through increasing the number, severity, and ratio of jointly identified problems. Speculative style marital communication was the second most influential speech style, acting to reduce the number and severity of marital problems and increase the proportion of problems jointly identified.

While controlling and speculative styles have similar proportions of their problems cited by both spouses, the number and severity of marital problems for the two styles are at the extremes--indicating very different reasons for the similar proportions of joint problems. Controlling style speech may have a higher proportion of joint marital problems due to early and repeated revelation by both spouses of what they think/feel and what the other spouses should think/feel, without problem resolution. Couples with a higher proportion of speculative style speech may reveal their perceived problems to each other, but in addition go on to resolve problems while the severity is relatively low.

Conventional style speech has almost no influence on the number, severity, or the likelihood of a problem being jointly identified. Conventional communication may reflect the couple's marital satisfaction through a willinesness to speak with each other rather than remain silent, and through speaking help avoid problems rooted in feelings of neglect and/or the absence of information (e.g., personal schedules) but conventional style speech does not appear to be useful for problem resolution.

The limited tests of similarities between marital communication characteristics and characteristics of marital problems did not support the proposition even though we were able to empircally group marital problems along with dimensions of openness-of-self and openness-to-spouse.

While changes in research design and focus are needed (c.f., Banwart, 1979), this study provides encouragement to continue the search for a linkage between communication usage and marital problem creation and problem solving.

## Appendix A

No two people agree about everything all the time. I am going to read you a list of things that couples often have problems with. Please tell me whether it is a big problem, a medium problem, a little problem, or no problem. Even if you see something as just a little problem, we still want to know about it.

| Big | Med | Lit | No | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1. getting things done around the house |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 2. bedtime hour |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 3. inviting friends over without checking to see if it's OK |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 4. not listening carefully |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 5. willingness to talk about problems |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 6. criticizing |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 7. wife's cooking |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 8. being bossy |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 9. getting angry |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 10. spending money |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 11. putting things off |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 12. church attendance |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 13. doing things together |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 14. sexual relations |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 15. wife's irritating personal habits |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 16. watching TV |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 17. making decisions |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 18. disciplining the children |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 19. showing affection |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 20. husband's irritating personal habits |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 21. behavior at social gatherings |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 22. husband's driving |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 23. willingness to talk about everyday things |

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